

THE NEXT STEP IN CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

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The next step in civil service reform is an administrative agency with power over work relations, conditions and environment. The civil service commission is to have the full function of employment management. :: :: :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

A REVIEW of the history of civil service reform will show that there have been, up to the present time, two distinct and important steps taken in the direction of an efficient civil service. The first was prohibitive in nature, having reference to a specific abuse. The original civil service act of 1883 aimed to guard the entrance into the service against the abuses of the spoils system. The second is corrective and regulatory in nature, having reference also to a specific abuse. I refer to the inequalities in the salary scale of any typical group of civil service workers. As is well known, Chicago blazed the trail in 1909 for the classification of positions on a duties' basis as the essential initial stage in setting up an equitable salary scale. A third step in advance, which is just now getting under way, is corrective and constructive in nature, having reference to the whole round of employment conditions and relations. I refer to the policy that has already been adopted in part in certain jurisdictions to make of the civil service commission an administrative agency with authority to investigate or stimulate investigations and to administer or to supervise the administration of all those influences in the work relations and work environment which affect the worker and his efficiency. This would cover everything from hours and wages to office conditions.

This policy is based on the practice of modern scientific management in the industrial field and on the conviction of the most enlightened employers that the human part of the plant is worthy of the same sort of intelligent analysis and control as the mechanical, or, to state it more technically, that a high rate of productivity requires sound personnel management, as well as sound purchasing, maintenance and sales management.

If interpreted broadly, this third step is the final one in civil service reform, for it involves the establishment of an organization that will be responsible for the correction of any and all abuses that may arise in civil service relations. Moreover, if it functions properly it will go even further, for its functions include not alone the anticipation of abuses and the elimination of causes of abuses in advance, but also the initiation of measures that will build up the tone of the service and awaken in it a truly creative *esprit de corps*. This last is the ultimate test of successful employment management whether in civil or industrial and commercial service.

Such reasoning led the Training School for Public Service of the Bureau of Municipal Research to offer, in 1918-19, a series of courses in employment management in co-operation with the War Industries Board—such courses as were being given in various

schools and universities all over the country. Although the main body of the students was made up of those sent from industrial establishments, there were always one or more students who came from the civil service field. In taking up the special problems of such students it was found that there was never any reason to seriously modify the fundamental principles of employment management that had been generally accepted.

I feel the more convinced of this after having made the effort, as a member of the directing staff of the joint congressional commission on the reclassification of salaries, to apply these principles to the employment policy of the federal government. It will be found on examination that the policy that has been incorporated in the bill of the reclassification commission, or recommended in the report accompanying the bill, corresponds in all of its fundamental features to the policy that is embodied in the standard principles of modern employment management.

Although this policy has not yet been enacted into law and therefore tested out in practical operation, it has been so thoroughly scrutinized and criticized by representative congressmen, civil service administrators and employes that there is every reason to assume that in its main features it will be ultimately adopted.

Certain outstanding considerations that may be applicable to other jurisdictions as well may be derived from the effort made in the work of the reclassification commission to develop a well-rounded and up-to-date employment policy for the federal civil service.

CENTRAL EMPLOYMENT AGENCY NEEDED

First and foremost among such considerations, as I have previously

indicated, is the fundamental importance of establishing a central agency endowed with some degree of administrative power, or at least with the right and obligation to investigate, report and recommend to the administrative head or legislative authority with regard to employment conditions. It is the belief of those who have given this matter special attention that such centralization of supervisory control would largely eliminate the difficulties commonly arising among civil service workers.

As this is so important a consideration it will be profitable to analyze the causes of maladjustments frequently occurring in the civil service.

It seems to the writer that most difficulties to-day are to be charged: (1) either to more or less inflexible control in certain directions on the part of the legislative body, or (2) to such a distribution of authority among a shifting group of administrative officials that impartiality and zeal, favoritism and neglect, jog comfortably along side by side.

As to the first, legislators naturally think in terms of law and express themselves in terms of law. But in its very nature law is likely to become static; and it is unlikely to brook exceptions. Numerous instances might be cited to prove the harmfulness of remedying employment conditions by means of sweeping legal regulations. Legislative bodies because of their natural method of articulation and control—namely, by means of legal regulation—are probably peculiarly unfit to administer employment conditions that are, by their very nature, so little given to standardization and predetermined treatment. Without further argument one may conclude that successful personnel administration is far removed from administration by legal enactment. Success lies rather

in the direction of vesting broad discretionary power in an administrative agency that is responsible to and also has ready access to the legislative body.

The second reason for charging a central agency with the responsibility for supervising employment relations is that the administrative heads—normally political appointees—come and go, both the good and bad, the experienced and the inexperienced. This makes for a certain element of irresponsibility, but it also leads to a bewildering variety of practices affecting the employees. Moreover, tradition plays a very decided rôle. The average administrator, realizing the more or less temporary character of his tenure of office, is likely to accept the things that be.

A SATISFACTORY CAREER THE GOAL

Although it is perhaps most natural to refer first of all to the abuses which a central employment agency might eliminate, I conceive of it, however, as engaged largely in constructive activity, and shall, therefore, develop its activities from this point of view. At the very outset I would emphasize that its goal and target is to make possible and to assure the worker the only thing that makes life worth while, *i.e.*, a satisfactory career.

Briefly stated the conditions that must be observed to accomplish this are the following: a fair wage, opportunity for growth and promotion, recognition of work well done, healthful and safe working conditions, and, finally, adequate opportunity for self-expression in the work itself as well as in determining the conditions surrounding it. This is the program of a modern employment agency, and it adopts this program confident that every element in it can be justified in terms of increased returns and improved service.

The degree of activity of a central agency engaged in carrying out the different functions implied in the program just outlined will vary. In some directions its activity would consist in co-ordinating the policies of the various administrative units; in others, it would resolve itself into stimulating administrative officers to initiate and co-operate in carrying out a common policy; in still others, it would become simply a matter of general supervision. But in every phase its success will be conditioned by its ability to establish and maintain cordial co-operation with both the administrative heads and the rank and file of the workers and its tact and resourcefulness in presenting an employment policy to them that is both sound and practicable.

If the civil service commission, the natural agency to undertake this work, is selected as the personnel organization, it would necessarily have to become a part of rather than apart from the rest of the administration. The latter is all too often the case to-day. Without interfering with the autonomy of the organizations involved, its representatives should keep in such intimate contact that they cannot alone make careful job analyses for the purpose of filling positions better and keeping the classification current, but that they also may contribute constructively toward developing a vital *esprit de corps*, the final goal of any employment policy worthy of the name.

DUTIES OF THE CENTRAL AGENCY

Having reviewed the chief reasons for centralizing responsibility, it will be in order to consider the functions of a central personnel agency for civil service in some detail. They may be summarized under five headings: (1)

employment, (2) research, (3) training, (4) health and safety, (5) joint control. The first two are administered directly by the central agency. Its function as to training is to stimulate and co-ordinate; as to health and safety, to supervise in a general way the activities of a medical staff and a safety engineer working on part or full time; as to joint relations, to recommend the organization of and to co-operate with representative advisory or personnel committees.

To discuss briefly the scope of these activities under (1) employment are included the functions of recruiting, selection, follow-up, development of a uniform efficiency rating system, transfer, promotion and personal records. Under (2) research is to be understood job analysis and specifications, the development of more practical and effective tests and examinations, wage and cost of living studies.

The activities listed under the first two functions are sufficiently understood to be acceptable without further argument. This is not the case as to the remaining three. Therefore they will be treated in some detail.

The third function, training, would require a survey of the policies now in operation as to the methods of introducing a new appointee into the work of the organization and also of the opportunities now offered for training for promotion. Such a survey would lead to the formation of special courses adapted to the work of the service for which there seemed to be need or demand, these courses being given either within the service or in co-operation with the public schools or other institutions of learning. The personnel department must be alive to the need of devising means whereby unsuspected talent may be discovered and developed, and ambition may find an appropriate outlet. For younger recruits, particu-

larly, the opportunity for growth is more important even than a satisfactory wage.

Training and promotion are inextricably bound together. The civil service commission that does not develop a well-balanced promotion policy which is closely knit together with a sound training policy is failing to take the second most important step—the first is naturally a proper salary scale—toward rehabilitating the civil service.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

As to health and safety (4), the federal government and more than one state government have permitted a laxity in the supervision of working conditions that would not be tolerated by most progressive employers and wide-awake factory and building inspectors in our leading states. From one report alone that was submitted to the reclassification commission by the public health service one reads of tubercular and syphilitic persons working in one department side by side with their fellows. From another source, of a victim of tuberculosis who was discharged by one department from fear of contagion and taken on by another that was never informed of the danger.

Factories have found that health supervision, emergency attendants rest rooms and visiting nurses pay big returns in terms of what the English call better "time-keeping." Washington has discovered the same thing in a few bureaus, but not in most. There are to-day literally tens of thousands of clerks who have no access to rest rooms and no expert or even first-aid assistant at hand in time of emergency.

Those less obvious factors that influence both efficiency and health, such as temperature, humidity, ventila-

tion and lighting, are controlled only by chance in the average civil service establishment. I imagine that each reader can recall from his immediate experience offices or work rooms where good standards with respect to such working conditions are grossly violated. This applies as well to safety standards. The federal government with elevators minus all safety appliances, doors opening inward, lack of proper fire escapes and means of fire protection is probably not unique among civil service jurisdictions.

These matters that have been nobody's business heretofore may reasonably be put under the general control of the personnel organization, which should probably be empowered to enlist the co-operation of the board of health and the engineering department.

DEMOCRACY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Finally, joint control. In theory, at least, the leaders of industry have gone on record as in favor of a measure of joint control—now frequently called industrial democracy. The question naturally presents itself as to whether the administration of a democratic government should not also be expected to function democratically; if not to assume the leadership, at least to make a start on the path that has already been blazed by a number of progressive private employers.

There is no time to weigh the pros and cons of this suggestion. I can only say that the reclassification commission proposes the formation of an advisory council—representative in character—that would work with the civil service commission and bring to bear on the formulation and amendment of civil service policies the judgment and interest of those most concerned and most competent to advise. The reclassification measure also pro-

vides for the appointment of representative committees in each of the organization units and their major subdivisions. It is recommended that they might in the first instance handle grievances, initiate efficiency ratings, consider and make suggestions as to the work process and working conditions.

It is obvious that we have not yet made a start in this direction. It is equally obvious in my opinion that we shall and must. The civil service units in a democratic country must be administered democratically. Instead of being laggards, they should rather point the way. As a government, whether federal or local, let us practice what we preach.

If the theory of joint control is accepted, the practical implications for the personnel agency would seem to involve the following functions: (1) to outline a policy for the selection of representative committees in the various major divisions of the government, (2) to make constructive suggestions from time to time as to the next steps to be taken in the direction of more democratic administration of personnel matters, (3) to stimulate consistent action on the part of those in charge, and (4) finally to co-operate with properly chosen representatives with regard to all matters over which the civil service commission has responsibility.

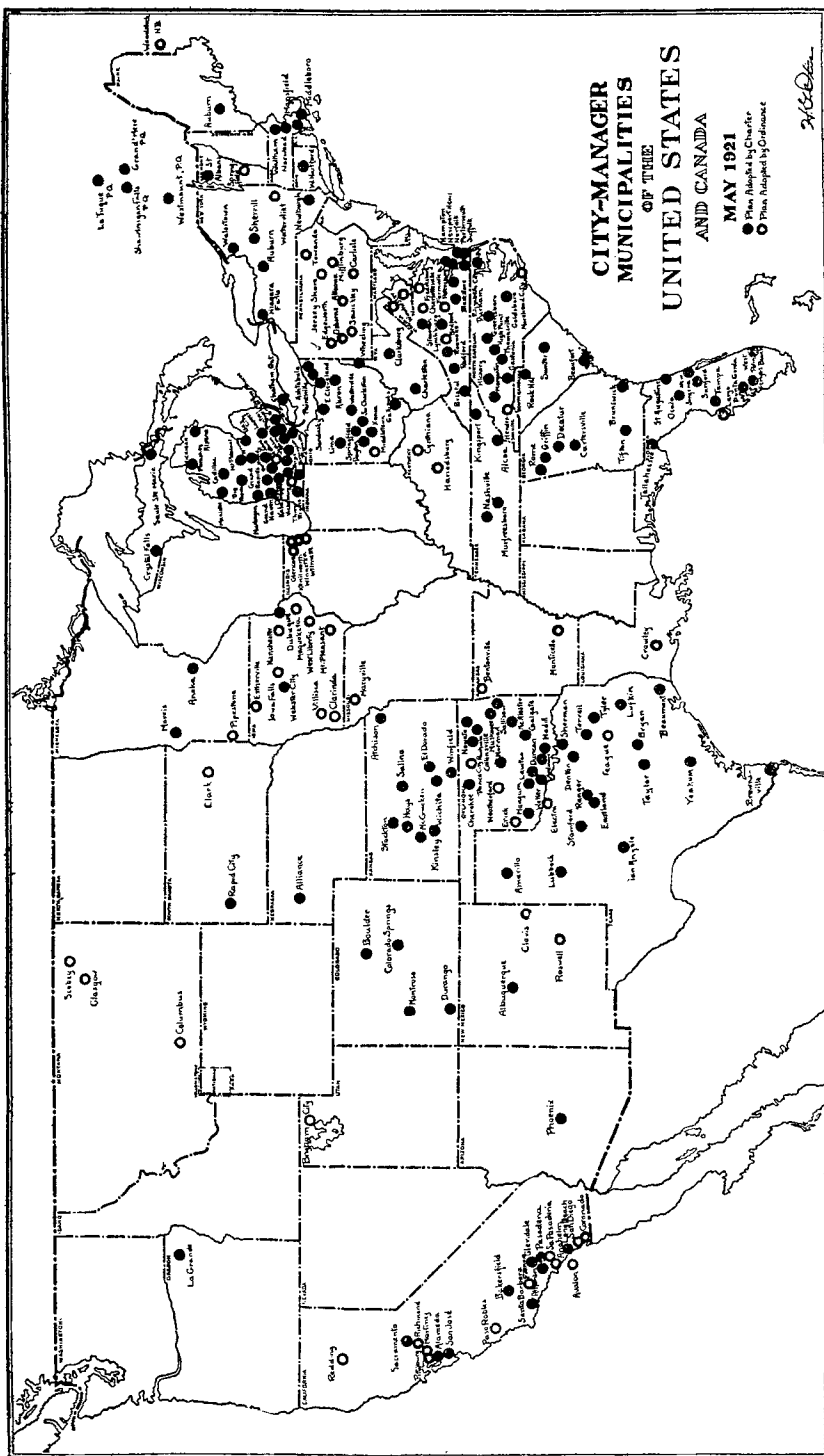
I have now outlined what I think is the next step in civil service reform. In concluding, I should say that I am fully aware of the fact that this step will not be taken by any civil service unit once and for all, nor probably by any two in one and the same way. But I am confident that what I have called the third step in civil service reform will ultimately be taken, since it is founded on two basic and fundamental considerations: the one, increased efficiency because of a more efficient

personnel, and the other, human aspirations and rights. The responsibility for these two determining factors in any productive enterprise cannot be left to chance as they have been in the past; they, too, must be controlled and supervised by a part of management that has been specially charged with this function. If the civil service commission is to take over the functions outlined above, the typical commission must be rehabilitated, or, probably better, reconstituted. In the past the commissioners have often been political appointees, unqualified and inexperienced so far as personnel administration is concerned; they have commended themselves to administrators chiefly through being innocuous; normally, they have been consigned to isolation, or at least treated with toleration by those whom they were professedly serving. The first step towards rehabilitation is therefore the appointment of professional

and experienced administrators who have won their spurs in the difficult task of handling or, better, leading large groups of men. Secondly, employment experts must largely supplant and otherwise supplement the employment clerks who now constitute nearly the whole working force of the typical civil service commission. Finally, and this is of essential importance, the rather substantial dividing walls between the civil service commission and the various departments must be swept aside and intimate contacts established.

If this does not occur, if functionalized employment management is not set up, the familiar civil service jog-trot will continue, abuses and irritations will ceaselessly arise, costly drives for specific reforms will follow one upon the heels of another, and basic civil service reform will continue to be something wished for, but not attained.

A GEOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE CITY-MANAGER PLAN



This map, prepared for publication in the seventh year book of the City Managers' Association, presents graphically the spread of the city-manager movement. Michigan leads with 29 cities, California has 20, Texas 19, while Oklahoma and Virginia tie at 18—north, west, south and east. Since this map was drawn, Houston, Texas, has created the position of manager by ordinance and Miami, Florida, and Bluefield, W. Va., by charter, bringing the number of municipalities now operating under, or pledged to city-manager government in the United States to 227,—162 by charter, 65 by ordinance, in Canada 7, of which 6 are by charter, a total of 233.